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ABSTRACT

Current literature on social studies methods courses for secondary education teachers focuses on rationales, quantitative data, criticism, and innovations. Although social studies methods courses are highly criticized, a paucity of literature exists on the rationale for the course, most of which calls for increased conceptualization. In contrast, an abundance of quantitative data on teaching practices consists of surveys of course instructors or reports by an instructor on methods of his particular course. All of these reports focus on a different aspect of the methods course; thus, there is little cumulative impact to them. Criticism expressed by students and instructors suggests that the methods courses are impractical, too theoretical, and taught by instructors who have lost touch with the public schools. Critics point out that instructors often resort to lecture as the main mode of instruction and that weaknesses in textbooks lead to weaknesses in instruction. Most material on innovation is based on empirical studies or personal narratives of a particular approach. An extensive work discusses contemporary-based education, the values analysis approach, and the human relations approach. A general conclusion is that although methods courses should be an important part of a teacher's professional training, current content and format are not effective. (KC)

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PATTERNS IN SOCIAL STUDIES METHODS COURSES: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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SP 021 516

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, College and University Faculty Assembly, Boston, November 1982.

Introduction

I would like to begin with two facts and an article of belief. The first fact is that the social studies methods course is one of the few activities--other than going to CUFA meetings--in which we have all shared, probably as students and almost certainly as instructors. The second fact is that the social studies methods course (and, in fact, all methods courses) has been and still is a much maligned experience. A recent example of attack by, coincidentally, a local university president may give some flavor of the harshness of the criticism. In an interview he was quoted as saying that "My wife intended to be a teacher, but she simply could not sit through all those courses in methodology. They were mindless. They were the laughing stock on most campuses, and still are. They have done more to deter highly qualified women from going into teaching than anything else." (Silber, 1982, p. 17) An editorial in the July 1982 issue of American Education made essentially the same charge.

The article of faith, which Dick Gross and I share, is that the social studies methods course (and I am speaking predominantly about the secondary level, where our interests lie) can be--indeed, ought to be--a valuable experience,

serving preservice teachers as a mediator between their history and social science college course work and the realities of the classrooms in which they will be operating.

Beyond these two facts and our belief there is not a lot that can be said about the special methods course with assurance. As central as it might be to what social studies educators do, not much has been written (and presumably thought) about it. One who has written about it argues:

> The social studies methods course is perhaps the closest thing to a common experience that social studies teachers have . . . . Given the nature of many social studies undergraduate programs the methods course is the social studies educator's best, and often his only, formal opportunity to influence the teaching of social studies. The burden of the course is indeed heavy.

(Marker, 1970, p. 1) Those carrying that heavy burden will find little direct assistance in the professional literature. Theory and Research in Social Education, for example, is "designed to stimulate and communicate systematic research and thinking in social education." It welcomes manuscripts on a variety of topics including "relationship of different pre- and in-service patterns of teacher training to social education." Yet after twenty-five issues and nine years of fruitful expansion of knowledge, it has still to find an article focused on the social studies methods course worth publishing.

The review of the literature presented here is intended to redirect our professional concerns toward the condition

and future of this course. It should be noted that the scope of this review does not include the consideration of dissertations. Fifteen dissertations which contain both the terms "methods course" and "social studies" in their titles were extracted from the data base of Dissertation Abstracts, 1961-1982. These call for collective scrutiny. Undoubtedly, additional dissertations contain material on the social studies methods course which is not evident from their titles and which is therefore not readily retrievable. (See, for example, Luchsinger, 1969) Social studies methods texts and studies of such texts are another fruitful source of data and inferences about the methods course which is excluded in the scope of this paper. (See, for example, Ballinger, 1963, and Stanley, 1982)

The questions addressed to the literature were: (1) What rationales or justifications have been offered for the special methods course in the social studies? (2) What quantitative data have been gathered? (3) What is the nature of the criticisms? (4) What innovations or changes have been recommended? (5) What patterns or conclusions can be drawn from the literature?

Justifications for the Course

One of the striking aspects found in reviewing the literature is the paucity of thought given to the rationale

for the social studies methods course in the preservice teacher education curriculum. Considering the frequent hostility expressed toward the course, it is surprisingly difficult to find theoretical or empirical justification for its existence and usefulness. Patrick (1973) is one of the handful who have addressed this issue:

> Most critics of social studies methods courses agree that fundamental questions about the purposes of teacher education in the social studies have not been raised and examined fruitfully. Efforts at theorizing have been high-flown, vague, and impractical. To a considerable extent, the business of social studies methods instruction has been an ill-defined enterprise, an array of facts and techniques without a powerful supporting conceptual apparatus. Tinkering with techniques has been much more extensive than the thoughtful consideration of what the particular techniques are good for and how they might be combined to produce the most competent teachers.

(p. 2) An example of the kind of thoughtful consideration Patrick advocates can be found in Shaver, Davis, and Helburn's discussion of the recent NSF Status Study. They use the data from the social studies education portion of the NSF Study to analyze the divergent views of academicians and teachers. Their conclusions require methods instructors to rethink why and how they teach:

> In short, the teacher's beliefs and the demands of the school as a social system are largely incompatible with the norms of the university scholarship system and with the norms of teaching espoused by trainers of teachers . . . . Teacher

> education and curriculum development need not undermine the teacher's management position, or appear to do so.

(1980, pp. 11, 13)

As a start toward conceptualizing what should go on in a methods course, Smith and Cox (1969, pp. 159-161) have made the useful distinction between "method" and "technique." No one has followed up on that point.

A provocative study directed toward the rationale for the methods course has been conducted by Raths and Katz (1982). They found that the learning outcomes which methods instructors attempt to foster are not related very well to those attributes which those same instructors believe to be essential in developing into a successful teacher. They concluded that (p. 10):

> instructors believe that what contributes significantly to successful teaching are dispositions and other personal qualities which, in fact, cannot be taught in methods classes. This puts them in the position--no doubt a demoralizing one--of believing that that which is more useful in the repertoire of a teacher cannot be taught by them, or perhaps by anyone, and conversely that what can be taught is all right, but tangential and insignificant. If this characterization of the thinking of pedagogues themselves is close to the truth, they may be caught in a recursive cycle of . . . low effort-low impact-low effort that is difficult to break. What may be missing, among other things, is educational and intellectual leadership within the institution and profession which would attempt to break the cycle . . . and confront some of the issues implied in trying to please students, colleagues and the ultimate clients, i.e., the schools . . . .

The call, again, is for increased attention to the conceptualization of the methods course.

Quantitative Data

In contrast to material on theories about the methods course, there exists a relative abundance of quantitative data about what goes on in the course. That data tend to be of two types: (1) surveys of a number of course instructors, and (2) reports by a course instructor of practice in his or her particular course.

The surveys located were state-wide (Robinson, 1980; Katz, et al., 1981; and Raths and Katz, 1982), regional (Switzer, 1977), and national (Gross, 1982). A variation to the survey of methods teachers was Lowe and Corbin (1970), who surveyed experienced educators in New York State about their recommendations for the methods course.

The reports of practice can be divided into two categories: (1) empirical studies with the trappings of statistical power and precision, and (2) more informal reports of techniques or practices attempted. In the first category the following studies could be placed: Dunathan (1973), Merwin (1973), Napier and Vansickle (1978), and Bennett (1979). In the second category the following documents were identified: Seifman (1971), Parsons (1980), and Bishop and Warner (1981). All of these reports focus on a different aspect of the methods course, and, as might be anticipated, there is little cumulative impact to them.

Criticisms

It was mentioned initially that methods courses have been the object of hostility since their origination (Auerbach, 1957). Some of that antagonism has come from "outsiders," people with no experience in such a course as students or teachers but with a negative point of view on it nonetheless. Probably the most prominent among the outside critics has been Charles Silberman, who concluded in 1970 that "'those terrible methods courses' [quoting Conant] . . . tend to be both intellectually barren and professionally useless . . . . There can be no greater demonstration of the irrelevance of most methods courses than the way the methods professors teach." (p. 443) Such criticism could be discounted perhaps as based on brief encounters or as politically motivated. There is sufficient criticism, however, expressed by students and instructors quite familiar with the course to force acknowledgement and consideration of their judgments.

A typical set of criticisms comes from practicing teachers who, when asked to reflect back on their experiences in the methods course, reflect that

> "The professor meant well, but he didn't know what it was like out here in schools like this one. I would like to see him do all that stuff in this place.
>
> The course was too theoretical, I never did see what it had to do with the subjects I teach.
>
> The course was interesting, but all that unit planning was a waste of time, I haven't done one of those since I graduated."

(Marker, 1970, p. 1) Shaver, Davis, and Helburn's (1980) interpretation of the NSF Study updates and lends further support to these kinds of comments. Luchsinger (1969) found that student teachers and recent graduates perceived their required education courses as impractical, too theoretical, and as being taught by instructors who "had lost contact with the realities of the modern public schools." Lawrence Metcalf, a respected social studies educator with intimate knowledge of the methods course, described it as one in which instructors elaborated on the banal and the obvious.

Another salient criticism is that methods teachers fall into a "content trap," feeling a need to cover much material and therefore resorting to lecture as the main mode of instruction. (Koziol, 1979; Lowe and Corbin, 1970) Many of us are familiar with (and have probably delivered) the lecture in the methods course on the hows and whys of inquiry as an essential learning strategy, although unhappily there just was not enough time to actually demonstrate or use it.

A related criticism is that methods courses attempt to do too much. Educators favoring competency-based instruction, for instance, claim that the scope of instruction is too broad and the content too diffuse. (Patrick, 1973, pp. 5-6)

Ballinger (1963) and Stanley (1982) point out how weaknesses in methods course textbooks lead to weaknesses in methods course instruction.

Innovations

The most common type of literature on the methods course is an advocacy of a particular innovation or change in content, technique, or structure. Some of these documents are based on empirical studies, others are simply descriptions of an idea the instructor has tried out. It is easy to criticize these reports on various grounds--lack of empirical rigor, or insufficient detail, or overelaboration, or naiveté, or absence of theoretical framework--yet there is an earnestness and concreteness to them which makes for rather appealing reading. Somebody has tried out an idea and reported on it; the thoughtful reader can visualize whether there are adaptive possibilities for his or her own situation. These documents can spark investigation of fresh approaches whose possibilities had been scabbed over by the scars of experience. Good ideas, perhaps once known, can be revived.

Examples in this genre include Marker (1970) on the relative merit of teaching teachers to be curriculum developers versus teaching them to be selectors and adaptors of prepackaged materials; Merwin and Schneider (1973) and Merwin and Templeton (1978) on the use of self-instructional modules; Koziol (1974) on identifying high priority content; Holman and Maxim (1977) on the use of activities (field trips) outside the college classroom; Williamson (1977) on a program of individualized instruction; Johnston (1978) on the use of genealogy; Parsons (1980) on the use of

cooperating school teachers in instructing the methods course; Riddle (1980) on teaching history as interpretation; Skeel (1981) on the importance of instructor modeling; and Crosthwait (1981) on the use of exposition.

The most extensive work of this nature is Patrick's monograph on reforming the social studies methods course (1973). He suggests three models for reform. Although he discusses them in neutral terms, he devotes far more attention to competency-based teacher education than to the "values analysis" approach (focused on the model of a reflective teacher, able to make wise judgments) or the human relations approach. Patrick follows the three models with seven "promising techniques" (pp. 11-22):

(1) self-instructional learning packages
(2) protocol materials
(3) simulation
(4) prototype lessons
(5) curriculum materials analysis system
(6) classroom interaction analysis systems
(7) microteaching

Even though the connections between the models and the techniques are tenuously drawn, the entire volume provides useful and suggestive material.

Surprisingly, only a few documents concerned with the relation of the methods course to field experience at the secondary level could be found. One study (Napier and

Vansickle, 1978) found no differences between preservice teachers who had undergone a field experience (albeit an admittedly "weak" one) as part of their program and those who had not. A second study (Merwin and Templeton, 1978) supported the combination of the student teaching experience and the social studies methods course on site via the use of self-instructional modules.

It seems clear from the literature and surveys that no particular change or innovation is sweeping the field. Even the most promising approaches have a difficult time "making a splash." To carry the watery metaphor further, promising changes are not being introduced into a calm pool--they are being introduced into a swimming pool filled with other swimmers and littered with previous ideas. So it is hard to find a place to enter, much less make a difference.

Conclusions

Considering the haphazard nature of the literature, few conclusions can be drawn with confidence. Those that follow should be tested against the results of the national survey of methods instructors and against one's personal experience.

In terms of content, there is some agreement that the social studies methods course attempts to do too much. In some cases the content density may be due to lack of communication with other components of a teacher education program so that the special methods instructor repeats

previously instructed general material as well as introduces material especially germane to social studies education. In other cases the broad scope of coverage may reflect the diffuse nature of the social studies curriculum in the schools. At any rate the counsel offered to overcome this liability which takes several forms: give up the effort to cover the field and settle on a few high priority items; cut back on the theoretical emphases and concentrate on practical skills; or expand the course into two coordinated units.

In terms of course format, a thread of conviction runs through much of the literature that the course cannot continue to exist if it is perceived as a typical lecture or lecture-discussion experience. Such a traditional approach appears too far removed from classroom realities to be effective. A number of solutions to this problem have been offered: coordinate more closely with student teaching; provide more field trips and other off-campus opportunities; bring the classroom teacher on to the campus to help teach the course; use protocol materials; do more project work (such as building one's genealogy); and incorporate some form of individualized instructional programs.

As Lowe and Corbin (1970) discovered, there is widespread agreement among social studies teachers that a special methods course can be and should be an important part of a teacher's professional training. There is equally widespread agreement that the various structures of content

and format presently employed are not proving effective. Further questions for study suggest themselves. Is there a reasonably standard national syllabus for the special methods course which an organization like CUFA could offer to the field as a guide? Where do methods instructors gain their conceptions of what the methods course should be? Are other teaching fields undergoing the same difficulties in their methods courses or have they worked out better solutions? In what ways can the methods course make a significant contribution to the development of competent social studies teachers? The search for answers to these questions carries import for all of us.

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